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CIA lies to the public, ex-agent says

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The Central Intelligence Agency deliberately misinforms the American public to build support for U.S. policy in foreign countries, a 25-year veteran of the agency said last night in a Lexington appearance.

Ralph W. McGehee, who left the agency in 1977 and in 1983 published the book *Deadly Deceits: My 25 Years in the CIA*, said the agency executed a campaign of misinformation during the Vietnam War and appeared to be doing the same in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

The American public was told that the legitimate government of South Vietnam was invaded by North Vietnam, McGehee said. "That was a lie," he said.

"It was decided we would create the invasion," he said.

McGehee traced CIA involvement in the Vietnam conflict to 1954, when he said the agency was ordered to create a non-communist alternative government.

"The CIA was ordered to impose a U.S.-backed government because we wanted the minerals, manpower and foodstuffs in the U.S. sphere of influence," he said.

Creating the South Vietnamese government, he said, "bastardized intelligence" in the future.

"From that point forward, until today, intelligence was intended to create an illusion" about Vietnam, he said.

McGehee said he became disillusioned with the agency in the mid-1960s after a mission in Thailand. During his efforts, he found that the CIA had been underreporting the number of communist guerrillas in the country.

"If the agency had allowed the truth about the Communist Party in Thailand to be told, the truth about the Communist Party in Vietnam also would have been known," he said.

The CIA was reporting that there were 700,000 communists in South Vietnam; the National Liberation Front was reporting there were 7 million, he said.

"We were the bad guys. . . . We were the invading party imposing our wills on an unwanting public."

McGehee said the CIA has continued domestic intelligence-gathering despite being prohibited from doing so in its charter. It conducted drug tests on unsuspecting citizens during the 1970s and has manipulated the media, he said.

"The CIA, according to sources, had about 400 media representatives . . . planting stories, keeping stories out," McGehee said. The representatives were employed by reputable agencies such as The Associated Press, United Press International and Reuters News Service, he said.

Information in McGehee's speech, he said, was derived from public records.

McGehee worked for the CIA from 1952 to 1977. He began writing his book immediately afterward.

During his tenure with the agency, McGehee said, he worked in the Directorate of Operations, the intelligence-collection and covert-action arm of the CIA. McGehee referred to it as the "Dirty Tricks Department."

He served in Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam, and earned several medals and a commendation from the director of the CIA. He said he was the chief CIA adviser to the head of the Vietnamese Special Police, the equivalent of the FBI.

McGehee's speech, at Central Christian Church, was sponsored by several Lexington groups.